Unclaimed Stories: Narrating Sexual Violence and the Traumatized Self in Elena Ferrante and Alice Sebold's Writings

Katrin Wehling-Giorgi

Abstract

My paper proposes a comparative reading that explores the links between sexual/gendered violence, trauma and untold experience in the earlier works of Alice Sebold (*Lucky*, *The Lovely Bones*) and in a selection of Elena Ferrante's texts (*L'amore molesto* and the Neapolitan Novels). Through the lens of trauma theory, I analyze the two authors' textual and ekphrastic negotiations of the traumatized subject, arguing that the experience of sexual abuse lies at the origin of their complex conceptualizations of femininity as well as often acting as a catalyst of aesthetic expression. Moreover, by showing how Sebold and Ferrante employ elements of magical realism to explore and articulate precisely those silenced spaces and gaps of experience, I argue that their works provide powerful examples of how female-authored texts resist master narratives.

Bio

Katrin Wehling-Giorgi is Associate Professor of Italian Studies at Durham University, UK. She has published widely on European modernism and twentieth-century and contemporary women's writing including Elsa Morante, Goliarda Sapienza and Elena Ferrante. She is the author of *Gadda and Beckett: Subjectivity, Storytelling and Fracture* (Oxford: Legenda, 2014), and she is the co-editor of *Goliarda Sapienza in Context: Intertextual Relationships with Italian and European Literature* (Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2016).

Addressing domestic and violent sexual abuse is all the more urgent at the time of writing as violence against women has reached new heights. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a global surge in domestic violence, putting vulnerable women at risk with "calamitous" consequences for women's lives over the next decade (Ford). While there has been a paradigm shift in the global visibility of sexual violence heralded by the #MeToo movement from 2017, the battle is far from over. As political agendas across the globe have shifted to the right in recent years, they have advocated a more stringent and totalitarian control on women's bodies and enabled a rhetoric that often legitimates violence against women.[i] If ever there was an age of "all-inclusive" trauma (Caruth, "Trauma" 4), the trope certainly powerfully resonates with our present-day experience of crisis, with women in particular severely affected by the new realities of the pandemic.

A palpable increase in violence against women and deep-seated gender inequalities are a worrying global trend and one of the central nuclei of a new "primordialism" (Appadurai) that has been further exposed by the current pandemic (Guterres). With gendered violence forming an intrinsic part of the global imaginary of contemporary world literature, coupled with a growing shift to "redefine experience, individual and historical, in terms of trauma" (Foster 167),[ii] Alice Sebold and Elena Ferrante's works provide a powerful gateway into the unacknowledged stories of the traumatized female subject and the global hegemonic norms that shape them. Despite their being embedded in two geopolitical locations as diverse as post-industrial (sub)urban North America and the conflict-ridden cityscape of post-war southern Italy, the present reading highlights the affinitive "constellation of aesthetic, affective and ethical forces" (Ganguly 24) that underpins the two authors' conceptualization of the violated, silenced subject.

In a *New York Times* article entitled "Speaking of the Unspeakable" (1989), Sebold laments the "wall of silence" that surrounds the experience of rape whilst underscoring the need to listen to "articulate victims". The author's violent rape in her freshman year in college was the catalyst for writing her memoir *Lucky*, first published in 1999, followed by the fantastic novel and bestseller *The Lovely Bones* (2002), posthumously narrated by the 14-year old rape and murder victim Susie. As Sebold's female protagonists navigate the aftermath of extreme violent crime, Ferrante's work is permeated by gendered violence and systemic abuse against women. In *L'amore molesto* (1992), in many ways the *Urtext* of Ferrante's entire oeuvre, sexual violence provides the impetus for aesthetic expression in the middle-aged protagonist Delia's gradual textual recuperation of unacknowledged child abuse. Patriarchal violence and abuse also substantially underlie the genesis of the complex narrative voice of the *Neapolitan novels* – consisting of the two protagonists Elena and Lila – that transposes the silenced story of the traumatized subject into its new, polyphonic form (de Rogatis, *Key Words* 42).

The paper proposes to explore the links between sexual/domestic abuse, trauma and untold experience in the works of Sebold and Ferrante, with the aim to shed new light on female-authored texts that resist hegemonic forms of power. Whereas I have previously highlighted the central role of the maternal figure in the two authors' disruptive constructions of selfhood (Wehling-Giorgi, "Rethinking"), the present investigation will analyze to what extent the experience of sexual abuse underlies their reflections on feminine subjectivity whilst often providing the first impetus for aesthetic expression. I will employ trauma theory – in particular Van der Kolk and Van der Hart's notion of dissociation and Caruth's theory of narrative memory – as a fruitful interpretive key to examine the female characters' textual and at times imagistic negotiation of the traumatized self. Furthermore, by showing how Sebold and Ferrante employ tropes of the fantastic and elements of magical realism, I argue

that they situate their stories in a literary genealogy that resists master narratives to bear witness to a subaltern, silenced voice.

1) Sexual Violence and Trauma

Rape or sexual violence remain unspeakable at various levels. Firstly, there is the social level at which abuse remains a difficult subject to broach in the community. Both Sebold and Ferrante's works in various ways deal with how sexual violence is silenced or normalized in society. In *Lucky*, Sebold's eponymous protagonist is confronted with the reluctance of members of her family and the community to call rape – a crime still shrouded in multiple taboos – by its name (76; 78). In Ferrante's texts, both Delia and Amalia in *L'amore molesto* and Lila in the Neapolitan novels long remain silent sufferers of sexual violence, with their stories only told once they have been painstakingly recuperated and integrated into narrative discourse.

Secondly, there are close links between sexual violence and trauma, an emotional shock which, "in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge" (Caruth, "Trauma" 153). Since unprocessed and unverbalized experience can be fully grasped only in connection with a belated time and place, trauma gives rise to a complex temporality and a crisis of representation that is intrinsically relevant for literature (Luckhurst 5). At least since Caruth's seminal work *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), trauma theory has come to be understood as a fruitful lens through which to examine literature as a means of communicating unacknowledged experience. The discursive structure of literature itself is an integral part of the elaboration of trauma and the essential translation of traumatic memory into "narrative memory": "the trauma […] requires integration, both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure" (Caruth, "Trauma" 153).

As Herman argues, trauma deriving from sexual violence and rape – in their intrusive violation of the natural perimeters of the body – has a particularly detrimental effect on the individual's world view as a whole:

> Traumatic events violate the autonomy of the person at the level of basic bodily integrity. The body is invaded, injured, defiled. […] In rape […] the purpose of the attack is precisely to demonstrate contempt for the victim's autonomy and dignity. (52)

As a brutal act of physical and psychological appropriation, rape systematically dismantles the victim's belief system whilst aiming to erase a woman's voice and agency.[iii] The texts considered below provide examples of how the violated subject performs its dissolution in narrative whilst regaining agency by reintegrating its voice into discourse.

2) Trauma and Silence in Sebold and Ferrante's Works

1) Sebold

In the appendix to her memoir *Lucky* ("Aftermath"), Sebold relates how – by reading Herman's seminal work *Trauma and Recovery*[iv] – she diagnosed herself with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) nine years after her violent rape. The author highlights a passage in Herman's work that references altered modes of perception of victims suffering from PTSD, including having an "elevated sense of arousal" and "always [being] on the alert for danger", all behavioral codes which she recognizes in herself (*Lucky* 247). Whilst living in the violence-stricken city of New York (249), an urban space reminiscent of Ferrante's Naples in

its recurrent recall of trauma, Sebold suffers from “hypervigilance and nightmares” (249). As she learns how trauma affects the human nervous system (247), Herman’s diagnosis profoundly resonates with her as she realizes that she has yet to come to terms with her rape (250).

The silence Sebold proceeds to address in her memoir and the subsequent novel is two-fold: based on her experience of the societal taboos and a legal system that regards only certain forms of rape legitimate, she claims to have “felt a responsibility” to write to fill a gap (Long), to address an overwhelmingly unacknowledged experience whilst condemning the degree of “denial and prettification” (“Speaking of the Unspeakable”) surrounding rape as dangerous. The adolescent protagonist of her second novel *The Lovely Bones,* Susie, “resurrects” the girl who was killed and dismembered in the same tunnel where Sebold was violently raped – an episode that is narrated in the epigraph to *Lucky* – as the author sets up a direct link between the memoir and the novel whilst highlighting the socio-political value of testimony. Sebold’s “novelistic witnessing” (Ganguly 179) aims to testify for those who have lost or never regained their voices - those who were less “lucky”.

On the other hand, with the benefit of the insights of trauma theory, Sebold tries to gain understanding about a violent event that is silenced as it has occurred outside the causal or spatio-temporal grid through which we conventionally apprehend reality. *Lucky* includes several episodes in which Sebold negotiates the traumatized self. As the protagonist returns to the dormitory in the immediate aftermath of her rape, covered in blood and visibly disheveled, her state of mind registers an acute absence: “I wasn’t there. I heard [the students] outside of me, but like a stroke victim, I was locked inside my body” (22). Subsequently, she collapses and experiences memory loss (24) and panic attacks (140). In the following weeks and months, she suffers from a heightened awareness of the dangers lurking around her, with the threat of sexual violence now seemingly all-encompassing (237): “rape means to inhabit

and destroy everything" (131). Sebold is overwhelmed by the images, nightmares (236) and hidden threats of normalized and often trivialized violence around her (87-88) as she notes how much her post-traumatic self has changed: "In my world, I saw violence everywhere" (88). The pervasive imagery of rape continues to dominate her perceptual field as she collects her sister from the University of Pennsylvania, where she is confronted in the elevator with a "vivid graffiti" of a girl called Marcie being gang-raped (63). Marcie, as Sebold learns, is one of the vast majority of rape victims who do not prosecute and are made to suffer in silence.[v]

During the traumatic experience itself, Sebold's reactions resonate with the psychic strategy of dissociation theorized by van der Kolk and van der Hart: "Many trauma survivors report that they automatically are removed from the scene; they look at it from a distance or disappear altogether, leaving other parts of their personality to suffer and store the overwhelming experience" (168; see also Herman 51-56). Sebold tries to resist the violent assault by mentally dissociating her body – which is overtaken by the rapist – from her brain, which preserves scope for agency instead: "the [rapist's] words made me give […] up [the mouth, the tongue, my breasts], lobbing off each part of my body as he claimed ownership". Sebold is dragged to the crime scene – a tunnel leading to an amphitheater – as a potential murder victim (14), while she exits the dark space having documented every gruesome detail of the attack: "all that remained unpossessed was my brain. It looked and watched and catalogued the details of it all" (Lucky, 16; 17; see also 19). In *The Lovely Bones*, Susie similarly "[begins] to leave her body […] to inhabit the air and the silence" during the sexual assault, to the extent that she feels "the corners of her body […] turning in on themselves and out" (TLB, 14). The mind-body division is further reinforced as a coping mechanism in the protagonist's post-traumatic sexual encounters in *Lucky*, during which she suffers from "painful flashes to the night in the tunnel" that leave her "numbed", leading her to subordinate her desire and to dissociate in moments of sexual intimacy (215). The tunnel

emerges as a central trope in both Sebold's and Ferrante's work that signals a real and symbolic threshold space of female subalternity (de Rogatis, *Key Words* 203), as I will further elaborate below.[vi] Sebold is reclaiming that space by translating trauma into words – literature is essential to testimony.

As traumatic experience cannot easily be organized into linguistic memory, the event is often "registered in a specific, imagistic way that stands outside normal memory creation" (Luckhurst 148-49). As I have argued previously (Wehling-Giorgi, "Rethinking"), Sebold makes ample use of ekphrasis in her works, and of photographic *imagetexts* (Hirsch 5) in particular, often to mark absence/loss or to underscore power relations between the photographer and the photographed. Her first two works are no exception. In *Lucky*, Sebold's police photograph taken shortly after the rape provides one of the first insights into her traumatized self as she registers the palpable absence of herself: "In the 'after' photos the police took, I stand shocked. The word shock, in this context, is meant to mean I was no longer there" (31). The police pictures are then contrasted with the "before" shots on the very day of the rape in which she self-consciously poses for her friend Ken whilst wearing a "frumpy" jumper. The light-hearted moments captured in the snapshots ("I smile, smile, smile"; 31) underscore the chasm that has opened up between her pre- and post-rape selves, with the imagetexts standing as powerful signifiers of the unspeakable dimension of traumatic experience. According to Herman, the traumatized subject suffers substantial damage "to the basic structures of the self", with the "identity […] formed prior to trauma […] irrevocably destroyed" (Herman 56). Sebold's "before" picture remain suspended as the material trace of an irrecoverable past (Hirsch 5).

Sebold's *Lucky* was initially shelved in the "self-help" section of Barnes and Noble. Further to challenging the silence surrounding the violent reality of rape, Sebold's narrative undermines deeply engrained cultural assumptions regarding race, class and gender. The

narrative includes some important political and social reflections that highlight precisely the dangers of focusing on the individual's personal response to violent crime and its "therapeutic" function only (Stone Watt 65). The protagonist is acutely aware of the fact that she is, indeed, "lucky"; not only to have survived, but to belong to an ethnicity and social class that are aligned with assumptions about what a credible rape victim should be like:

> "I knew what the superficials were and knew they stood in my favor: I was a virgin. […] I wore loose clothes and could not be proven to have behaved provocatively. There were no drugs or alcohol in my system. […] He was black and I was white. […]." (176)

Sebold is mindful of the fact that who is most critically scrutinized in the public eye is not the perpetrator, but the victim (Stone Watt 66). This is further emphasized in the stress she lays on the performative function of the victim in the judicial system – "the cosmetics of rape" – as she adjusts her appearance and testimony in line with social expectations (*Lucky* 31-32).

The dominant rhetoric of "victim" and "survivor" is thereby constructed as deeply problematic as it denies women the agency to narrate the complexities of their experiences whilst also "[veiling] over true experience" with "the crop of PC language" (Wark). The language Sebold employs in her memoir is everything but PC. She narrates the physical assault from her embodied perspective in minute and often graphic detail (16-17), filling in the gaps of "overly-sanitized accounts" of sexual violence (Stone Watt 67) whilst not sparing any details of the degrading, racially charged language and demeaning behavior adopted by the rapist: 'Nice white titties," he said.'; "You're the worst bitch I ever done this to," he said. It was said in disgust, it was said in analysis.'; '"Bitch", he said. His penis still limp, he held it with two fingers and peed on me. […] Acrid, wet, on my nose and lips. The smell of him –

the fruity, heady, nauseating smell – clung to my skin.' (*Lucky*, p. 16). In a razor-sharp and unflinching record of the verbal and extreme physical abuse "catalogued" by Sebold (13), she provides a sobering account of the crude exertion of male power against women. Acutely aware of the sociopolitical implications, Sebold repeatedly comments on the all-encompassing nature of the crime as she claims to "share [her] life with [her] rapist" (61). By integrating the previously unacknowledged experience of sexual abuse into the narrative, Sebold empowers the violated subject while underscoring the ethical implications of bearing witness "so as to render the unseen and unacknowledged suffering visible and […] humanized through shared sympathy" (Ganguly 19).

2) Ferrante

In Ferrante's work, gendered violence shapes the relationships between characters and, in the case of *L'amore molesto*, it acts as the foundational event of the narrative. The abuse suffered by the protagonist Delia as a five-year-old child provides the impetus for her journey back to her native Naples forty years later to investigate her mother Amalia's suspected suicide. The text gradually unearths the stories of two women who have been silenced by patriarchal power in a recuperation of the past that shares structural elements with the elaboration of trauma.

As Mandolini has shown, the various steps in the protagonist's journey lead from the acts of domestic violence against Amalia and Delia's sexual abuse to a phase of traumatic amnesia and ultimately the recollection of trauma and its reintroduction into the subject's discourse towards the end the journey (Mandolini 287). As she explores the city of her past, Delia realizes that the patriarchal power structures she grew up with (am 40, tl 36; am 126-27, tl 100-101) drew a rift between herself and her mother. The close links between the

rediscovery of trauma and the recuperation of the mother in *L'amore molesto* are well documented (see for instance Mandolini; Parisi; Wehling-Giorgi, "Ero separata"). As Delia explores the fragmentary memories and spaces of her childhood she averts a series of flashbacks (am 33; tl 30), gaps and lacunae ("Mi ricordo tutto o quasi tutto. Mi mancano solo le parole di allora"; am 150),[vii] the pursuit of which ultimately lead her to the retrieval of the hidden memories of the abuse she suffered as a young child at the hands of Caserta's father.

Herman underlines the profound impact of child abuse, with repeated trauma in childhood forming and deforming a personality that is still amenable to shaping (96). The child's coping strategies include what Herman terms "dissociative virtuosity", leading her to "hide [her] memories in complex amnesias, to alter [her] sense of time, place or person, and to induce hallucinations" (102). In severe cases, dissociation may result in creating an alter ego or double self that takes on the "contaminated, stigmatized identity" that emerges from the traumatic event (Herman, 107). While this splitting usually occurs within the subject itself, Delia projects the sexual transgressions onto her alter ego/mother instead. Ferrante hence stages the fragmentation process from within the pre-symbolic, symbiotic bond between Delia and Amalia in early childhood ("Fingevo di non essere io. Non volevo essere 'io', se non ero l'io di Amalia"; am 166),[viii] thereby further highlighting the damaging effects of gendered abuse on the mother-daughter bond. It is only upon the physical return to the very locus of abuse that Delia disentangles the dissociative mechanism of traumatic memory: "Facevo come mi ero immaginata che in segreto Amalia facesse. […] Ero io ed ero lei. Io-lei ci incontravamo con Caserta" (am 166).[ix]

The gradual recuperation of the mother's silenced and abused self is negotiated through the recurring trope of the tunnel. In Sebold's *Lucky*, the rape takes place in a dark tunnel, a threshold space that signals the protagonist's traumatic initiation into a world of violence and the start of the "real fight […] of words and lies and the brain" (14) that sees her

become a witness and writer. The latter space assumes an even more central significance in Ferrante's works. While the basement clearly signals the site of sexual violence and the recuperation of Delia's past, the tunnel is the space of archaic violence symbolized in Amalia's abuse. The young Amalia is routinely molested by men who touch her and make obscene remarks in an old railway tunnel (am 136-37; TL 108). The same underpass is also the place where Amalia makes the acquaintance with her future husband who, in a vivid premonition of things to come, frightens and chases her during their very first encounter (am 137; tl 109). After Delia's fraudulent "revelation" to her father, it is also "under the railway bridge" that Amalia flees from her violent husband, only for her to slip and end up violently beaten (am 117; tl 93). In one of the cardinal moments of Delia's journey, she returns to the tunnel – the locus of primal abuse – to recuperate her violated self through her mother's body ("Era possible che io stessi passando di là portandola dentro il mio corpo invecchiato […]?"; am 137).[x] The physical re-immersion into the dimly lit space brings back her memories of the past: "perché suoni e immagini si rapprendessero di nuovo tra le pietre e l'ombra" (am 138)[xi]. The tunnel as a liminal urban landmark emerges as a central trope in the recuperation of the maternal and of a repressed cultural imaginary of the silenced, abused female body (Wehling-Giorgi, "Writing Liminality" 209).

In the Neapolitan novels, we re-encounter the dark spaces of both the basement and the tunnel as the foundational moments of Lila and Elena's friendship. The labyrinthine space of Don Achille's cellar provides the first impetus for the force of the imagination to conquer this archaic fear (de Rogatis, *Key Words* 145; Milkova, "Minotauro"; "Mirrors and Labyrinths"). The latter act of emancipation is further reinforced in a subsequent episode involving the two girls' passage through a tunnel at the edges of the *rione*. Amalia sought refuge, slipped and was violently beaten by her abuser in the tunnel "appena lei tentava di parlare" (am 117).[xii] While Delia adopts her mother's silenced voice, Lila and Elena similarly

challenge this threshold space in a joint act of curiosity and subversion (ag 71; bf 75). Holding hands, the two friends traverse the semi-lit space, conquering their fears with the sound of their screams and laughs which violently "explode" and amplify on the tunnel's walls: "non facemmo che gridare, insieme e separatamente: risate e grida, grida e risate".[xiii] The chiastic structure of this rite of passage foreshadows the frequent reversals in the dialectic of their friendship and inaugurates their long, shared journey (ag 71; bf 75). The two girls find their polyphonic voice in the very space that has come to signal abuse in Ferrante's earlier work, actively challenging muted violence by translating it into a speech act in one of the many absences that generate a plenum (de Rogatis).

From a young age, Lila is particularly well-versed in the language of violence (ag 31; bf 35) that surrounds the girls in the scarred Neapolitan cityscape. Lila is "cattiva" (ag 37; bf 42; sbp 164; slc 188) and bold in what sets her apart as the character who most fearlessly challenges the tenets of patriarchal power. However, she increasingly suffers from the mental scars of domestic and sexual violence that manifest in states of heightened emotion and episodes of *smarginatura,* a neologism that expresses a form of psychic disorder with a resulting sense of fragmentation which bears close affinities with the *frantumaglia* of Ferrante's previous works.[xiv] As Lila is thrown out of the window by her father and breaks her arm at the age of 10, the scene is accompanied by an acute sense of dissociation and hallucinatory visions:

> "si era sentita assolutamente certa […] che piccoli animali rossastri, molto amichevoli, stessero dissolvendo la composizione della strada trasformandola in una materia liscia e morbida." (AG 86)

> "she had felt absolutely certain […] that small, very friendly reddish animals were dissolving the composition of the street, transforming it into a smooth, soft material." (BF 91)

When Lila is raped on her wedding night, the terror first experienced in the basement resurfaces from "la melma del rione" (ag 41)[xv] with renewed energy in the horror she experiences at the hands of Stefano, Don Achille's son. It is only much later that Elena becomes aware of the traumatic impact of rape as she reads Lila's *quaderni* (snc 355; snn 355-56).

Reminiscent of Sebold's *Lucky*, after various attempts at physical rebellion Lila relinquishes all force and abandons herself to the mute terror (snc 42; ann 42)[xvi] from which she dissociates: "Lila era assente" (snc 42).[xvii] Lila's psychic pathology shows significant parallels with Ida, the protagonist of Morante's *La Storia*. The latter is raped by a German soldier, during which she suffers an epileptic fit and subsequent blackout (70). Her story - orally related and transcribed by a heterodiegetic female narrator - is fractured by oneiric visions, epileptic fits (492) and hallucinatory episodes (340) which have a distinctly disintegrating effect on the linearity of the text (Wehling-Giorgi, "Totetaco" 195). Ida's predicament also bears significant similarities to Lila's (whose daughter Tina disappears) as she loses both her children, succumbs to insanity (*La Storia*, 647) and ultimately regresses to a state of silence that seals her exclusion from the symbolic order (465, 469). Privileging the story of the marginalized over hegemonic conceptions of History, Morante and Ferrante's female voices challenge the master narratives of socio-political and linguistic power structures.

Lila's psychic disorder principally manifests in the episodes of *smarginatura*. After a series of events that share elements of extreme violence and/or trauma, Lila suffers from

feelings of acute terror that become increasingly unmanageable and reach their peak during the earthquake of Naples and after her daughter Tina's disappearance. Carvalho highlights the close links between disrupted emotional development and *smarginatura,* as Lila has not learnt how to master affect and emotion owing to her violent, unstable upbringing (snc 367; snn 367). In their unbridled state, and given sufficient intensity, emotion as the "metaphorical lava beneath everyone's surface […] can become a literal experience" (Carvalho 104). The latter resonates with what van der Kolk and van der Hart term "speechless terror" (172), a state experienced by the traumatized individual as s/he fails to integrate sensory data at a cognitive or linguistic level, which in severe cases can result in a sense of complete disconnection from others and the resulting disintegration of the self ("annihilation panic", Herman 109).

The inability to process traumatic experience results in a series of explosive hallucinatory episodes that emerge from Lila's "dislocated" skullcap (see also sfr 174; tls 194; sbp 352-53; slc 402):

> "Dalla testa scollata le stavano uscendo figure e voci della giornata, fluttuavano per la stanza […] quegli urti violenti nella gola scuotevano il letto, aprivano crepe nell'intonaco, le dissaldavano la calotta cranica." (sfr 112-13)

> "From her unstuck head figures and voices of the day were emerging, floating through the room […] the violent knocking in her throat was shaking the bed, cracking the plaster, unsoldering the upper part of her skull" (tls 128)

While the state of heightened emotion originates in Lila's mind, it frequently extends to the reality around her, on which occasions she tends to "[sprofondare] in una realtà pasticciata,

collacea, senza riuscire più dare contorni nitidi alle sensazioni" (162).[xviii] The failure to master her emotions also clearly shows in the synesthetic impressions and the resulting sense of material fragmentation she experiences during these episodes: "un'emozione tattile si scioglieva in visiva, una visiva si scioglieva in olfattiva […] tutto se ne andava via in grumi sanguigni di mestruo, in polipi sarcomatosi, in pezzi di fibra giallastra" (SBP 162).[xix]

Herman argues that "traumatized people relive in their bodies the moments of terror that they cannot describe in words" (239). While Lila experiences psychosomatic symptoms well before the disappearance of her daughter,[xx] it is following the inexpressible grief (sbp 430; slc 497) of the latter that her pain most vividly seeps into her body. Since Lila does not cry or show signs of desperation (sbp 322; slc 368), Elena is left to speculate on her friend's state of mind. It becomes increasingly clear, though, that Lila's body somatizes the effects of trauma: she is described as having a weakened physical state (sbp 352; slc 401), suffers from hot flushes and in the last image Elena preserves of Lila her malaise borders on insanity, invoking parallels with the "madwoman" Melina (sbp 431; slc 498 ; see also sfr 172; tls 192): [xxi]

> "investita di fastidiose ondate di calore […] anche il collo le si chiazzava, le veniva uno sguardo smarrito, si afferrava il lembo della veste con le mani, si sventolava mostrando a me e Imma le mutande" (sbp 430).

> "[She] was hit by waves of heat […] There were patches on her neck, too, her gaze dimmed, she grabbed the edge of her dress with her hand and fanned herself, showing Imma and me her underwear" (slc 496).

Lila is ultimately diagnosed with uterine fibroids (355) and undergoes a hysterectomy, after which she experiences nightmarish visions of a monstrous birth: 'Tina […] uscita di nuovo dalla sua pancia' (sbp 355).[xxii] Rather than addressing the underlying trauma that is exacerbated by the loss of her child, Lila's condition is pathologized and her body is mutilated.[xxiii]

The Freudian notion of hysteria – prominently explored in Dora's story, one of the great silenced narratives of the past century - highlights the interdependence of neurological disorders and the female reproductive organ in patriarchal discourse (24).[xxiv] Feminists have long offered powerful reinterpretations of the transgressive figure of the hysteric, with literature in particular rewriting the female characters' psychosomatic symptoms as a means to express a silenced narrative, as a muted resistance to patriarchal repression (Giorgio 113-16). One literary figure that is likely to have inspired Ferrante's subversive conceptualization of Lila is Morante's Aracoeli. Like Lila, she is of lower social extraction and she loses her young daughter in infancy, a traumatic experience that remains unprocessed, pathologized and relegated to silence (*Aracoeli* 205). In the aftermath of Encarnación-Carina's death she starts suffering from physiological symptoms and a mental disorder (including the most transgressive of female conditions, nymphomania; 238; 270) that lead to a hysterectomy (218) and surgery for what appears to be a brain tumor. In Ferrante's text, the link patriarchal society continues to establish between the mental realm and the reproductive organs is similarly highlighted by Lila's hysterectomy and accompanying "madness", and it is reinforced by a neurologist who advises Lila to become pregnant to "cure" her psychic malaise ("non c'è medicina migliore per una donna"; sfr 173).[xxv] Haunted by the specter of hysteria, Morante and Ferrante narrate the stories of two women whose trauma is medicalized, highlighting long-standing appropriations of the female body. Rather than foregrounding the subalternity and silence of androcentric accounts of female madness and

trauma, however, the two writers provide a newly complex narrative of the traumatized subject, seizing the subversive potential of the abject female body to articulate a new form of truth that challenges hegemonic discourses of power:

> "In contemporary culture truth resides in the traumatic or abject subject, in the diseased or damaged body. To be sure, this body is the evidentiary basis of important witnessings to truth, of necessary testimonials against power." (Foster 167)

3) Unclaimed Stories

1) Sebold

In order for traumatic memories to be processed, they need to be transformed into narrative memory that is integrated into a completed story of the past. Quite apart from being an autobiographically inspired (self-)narrative, *Lucky* is littered with meta-fictional references to poetry and the intrinsic power of words and storytelling, constituting a hybrid genre which allows for fertile cross-contamination between reality and fiction.[xxvi] Aesthetic expression becomes a way of articulating – and indeed generating – an unclaimed and unprocessed truth that brings about a form of "empathic unsettlement" (LaCapra 102) in the reader. When faced with the overwhelming physical power of the rapist, Sebold realizes that her "real fight" lies in the power of rhetoric (14). As she dissociates during the brutal rape, she recites poems in her head (18; 20). When news of her attack starts to circulate in her hometown, a neighbor opens up for the first time about being raped at the age of 18. Her revelation provides the protagonist with "the proof that there was power to be had in sharing [her] story" (81). In

fact, writing not only offers Sebold a first creative outlet, but her determination to seek justice is first conceptualized in a "prescient" poem (110) that is strategically placed just before the second, chance encounter with her rapist (111). In a powerful statement on how poetry can determine the real, Sebold harnesses her voice ("It was the first time […] I was speaking to him", 108) and the memory of the offense, paving the path to her rapist's eventual conviction: "memory could save, […] it had power, […] it was often the only recourse of the powerless, the oppressed, or the brutalized" (114). It is the latter (including Lila, Marcie, her fellow student Maria Flores and the unnamed girl murdered in the tunnel) that Sebold writes into her texts to provide a powerful literary testimony of the women who have endured violence without getting justice.

If pain has no referential content and "cannot easily be objectified in any form, material or verbal", as Scarry has persuasively argued (162), one might purport that the traumatic moment is most powerfully represented in images that can be conveyed by literary language (Arva 74). To come back to the observations on ekphrasis above, Sebold employs a number of *imagetexts* to convey the otherwise speechless experience of trauma. Photographs capture essential moments or "traces" of the self that are subsequently forever lost, an aspect that is all the more evident when applied to the "before" and "after" of traumatic experience. As Sontag argues, all photographs are "memento mori" (15), giving rise to a dual temporality that captures "both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence" (16). This is nowhere more palpable than in *The Lovely Bones*, where Susie's old school photograph comes to stand not only as a moment and a materiality that has forever been lost but one might argue that it "metaphorically replace[s] [her] unrecovered body" (Bliss 2008: 863). The dual temporality of the photos representing her living self sets up a direct link with traumatic memory and loss:

> "I loved the way the burned-out flashcubes of the Kodak Instamatic marked a moment that had passed, one that would now be gone forever except for a picture. […] I had rescued the moment by using my camera and in that way had found a way to stop time and hold it. No one could take that image away from me because I owned it." (*The Lovely Bones*, 212).

Sebold crucially highlights the power of the photographer (239) in shooting the picture in a metonymic reference to the power of the writer. For, as Sontag puts it, "to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself in a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and therefore, like power" (4). The traumatized self has an innate urge to tell, and integrating the traumatic episode within a life story gives the survivor a form of control and mastery over his/her own narrative.

Through the use of *ekphrasis*, Sebold also sets up some interesting parallels between the protagonist and her best friend Lila, her "living, breathing soul mate" (212) or "clone" (*Lucky* 168; 223; 225; 238) in a bond that recalls the intimate friendship between the two main characters of the Neapolitan quartet.[xxvii] Sebold's Lila poses for a photographic service shortly before tragically meeting the same fate as her friend when she is raped in their shared flat. The protagonist decides to "play fashion photographer", shooting Lila in a variety of frivolous poses: "I think of them now as Lila's 'before' shots" (220). After her rape, Sebold feels as though the "pure" part of herself has now been tarnished (225), with Lila appearing "disheveled" and "visibly shaken". Her face betrays an absence that is reminiscent of Sebold's own post-rape photograph: "Her eyes were bottomless – lost. I couldn't have reached them no matter how hard I tried" (223). Despite countless attempts, Sebold remains unable to reconnect with Lila, who subsequently cuts her out of her life (238). Lila joins the vast majority of rape victims who will never see their perpetrator prosecuted, let alone

identified. As she frames Lila pre-rape self in the photographs, Sebold writes her silenced, traumatized voice into the narrative.

Like the protagonist of *Lucky*, Susie is well aware of the power of storytelling: "Each time I told my story, I lost a bit, the smallest drop of pain. […] I wanted to tell the story of my family. Because horror on Earth is real and it is every day" (*The Lovely Bones* 186). Crucially, in *The Lovely Bones* the protagonist's experience is narrated from a post-theological heaven, with the supernatural element firmly rooted in Susie's earthly experiences. In the integration of the supernatural as an "ordinary matter" that is "admitted, accepted, and integrated into the rationality and materiality of literary realism", Sebold's work displays close links with magic realism, in which the fantastic realm appears as "normative and normalizing" (Zamora and Faris 3). From the outset, Susie underlines the importance of elevating her personal suffering to a socio-political level, including the effects of violent sexual crime against women on her immediate family and the wider community. While she reclaims her voice as the first-person narrator of her coming of age story in an ecumenical heaven, Susie serves herself of the medium Ruth as she becomes her "second skin" and her words are given "the power to resurrect [her]" (117). Ruth writes poems to "cloak a [dark] reality" and she starts recording the destinies of the silenced victims in her journal. She has the supernatural ability to see the "world […] of dead women and children", which "has become as real to her as the world in which she lived". As she moves to New York, Ruth "records the death of women", "[documenting] the history of violence" (252) that would otherwise remain untold. Ruth not only visually recreates but she vividly *experiences* the traumatic events in the form of intrusive images and thoughts that are typical markers of PTSD (Luckhurst 148; Caruth 150/51): "Ruth would get an image and it would burn into her memory. Sometimes they were only bright flashes – a fall down the stairs, a scream, a shove, the tightening of hands around a neck […]" (251). In a further metafictional appeal to an

empathic reader, trauma is portrayed as uniquely transmissible as it "leaks […] between the victims and their listeners or viewers" (Luckhurst 3).[xxviii]

While the protagonist of *Lucky* reconstructs the story of her rape and its aftermath from the vantage point of a young adult, *The Lovely Bones*' Susie is only 14 when she is murdered. The postmortem narrative becomes an unconventional coming-of-age story (Norman 145), narrated from a celestial eschatology that is principally constituted by personal visions ("we had been given, in our heavens, our simplest dreams", 18). Susie's story remains fundamentally anchored on earth and motivated by a profound sense of mourning and her desire to be among the living: "Life is a perpetual yesterday for us" (10). In the seamless integration of the supernatural and earthly reality, *The Lovely Bones* shares some central features with magical realism that specifically resonate with the author's aim to tell an untold story. In fact, magical realism has a long history of recording the memory of the oppressed – most prominently in Toni Morrison's literary documentation of the traumatic history of slavery – and in recent years scholars have started highlighting its significant parallels with trauma.[xxix] The traumatized subject and magical realism indeed share the same ontological foundations as they address a silenced reality that escapes witnessing. Just as magical realism expands the natural boundaries of reality by enhancing its "black holes […] and inaccessible spaces" (Arva 69), *The Lovely Bones'* fantastical posthumous voice and its interpenetration on earthly reality serve to open up a new space for the traumatized female murder victim that cannot be apprehended by realistic forms of representation.

2) Ferrante

Testimony forms an equally integral part of the narrative in Ferrante's novels. In *L'amore molesto*, the resolutory episode in the basement is the moment when traumatic memory is

integrated into the protagonist's discourse. Delia at last finds the missing pieces of her story, formerly "fratto in mille immagini incoerenti" (am 164-65).[xxx] As she unmasks the unreliable surface memories of her childhood, she understands that the dissociative image of her mother and Caserta was "una bugia della memoria" (165).[xxxi] The violence of the past finally comes to an end as she reconstitutes her self in narrative: "dire è incatenare tempi e spazi perduti" (169).[xxxii] As Delia stitches together her fragmented past in words, she recognizes that her mother – her dead body still marked by the signs of expropriation[xxxiii] – had authored her own story (Milkova, "Artistic Tradition" 12). Like Delia, Amalia did not let herself be annihilated by patriarchal violence, but she re-shapes and re-narrates the commodified female body in her work as a seamstress: "aveva ridotto il disagio dei corpi a carta e tessuti […] s'era inventata fino alla fine la sua storia giocando per conto suo con stoffe vuote" (129-30).[xxxiv] While her mother adopts the needle as an "an alternative [female] discursive system" (Bayles Kortsch 4), through the protagonist-narrator Delia, Ferrante adopts the pen as a tool of masculine discourse to rewrite the female subject instead, thereby repurposing the tools of patriarchy.

In the Neapolitan novels, it is the polyphonic voice of the narrator that brings Lila's silenced narrative to the page. As Herman underlines, in victims of trauma intense sensory and emotional experiences "are disconnected from the social domain of language and memory", a mechanism by which "terrorized people are silenced" (Herman 239). Lila struggles to organize her traumatic experience into words, let alone into a coherent storyline, with *smarginatura* having a similarly disintegrating effect on the plot (de Rogatis, *Key Words* 31). As Lila continues to avert the threat of dissolving boundaries as she is "overwhelmed by her symptoms" (Ferrante, 'The Elena Ferrante Interview'), the sense of fragmentation and loss is performed in her absence-presence in the text that becomes the quartet's ultimate aesthetic *Schöpfungsakt* ("progetto estetico", sbp 433; slc 500): the dolls, Tina and ultimately

Lila all disappear. While Sebold articulates the unspeakable essence of loss in photographic images, Lila's absence is documented in the novels' ekphrastic imagery of absence: Lila self-mutilates her photo panel (snc 122; snn 123; Milkova, "Visual Poetics"; Wehling-Giorgi "Writing Liminality"), she is absent from a photograph of Elena and Tina published in the magazine Panorama (sbp 265; 427; slc 302; 492), and she cuts herself out of all family photographs documenting her presence (ag 18; bf 22). Furthermore, Lila repeatedly relinquishes authorship (sbp 297; slc 340): her manuscripts, letters and diary entries are only indirectly filtered through Elena's words. In an aesthetic dynamic that oscillates between creation and sabotage (de Rogatis), Lila's absent yet all-too-present voice seeps into the text in the form of a vertiginous undercurrent of emotion, affect and silent terror that powerfully sustains the act of writing.

As we have seen in Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, magical realist imagery becomes a productive tool to delve into the "doppio fondo" (de Rogatis, *Parole* 36; *Key Words* 37; 287) of the Neapolitan novels. Drawing upon "cultural systems that are no less 'real' than those upon which traditional literary realism draws" – including myths, legends, rituals and obsolete collective practices (Zamora and Faris 4) – Ferrante's quartet is impregnated with fantastic imagery that originates in the young Lila and Elena's magical intuition. One of the foundational moments in the quartet, the descent into the "underworld" of Don Achille's basement and the subsequent ascent to his flat is deeply imbued with mythological and fantastic imagery that inaugurates the two girls' emancipatory, creative journey.[xxxv] Of the two friends, it is Lila who is bestowed with special magical powers that oscillate between destruction – as for instance in the ability to "abort" her unborn baby (snc 85; snn 85), or to explode a pan (ag 224; bf 229) – and creation, articulated throughout the novel in Lila's power to bring objects to life (ag 226; bf 231), to emerge as "la voce incastonata nella scrittura" (ag 222).[xxxvi]

The representation of the lived experience of traumatized subjectivity, according to Luckhurst, "requires fantastical tropes, exploded time schemes and impossible causations" (97). In order to translate the traumatic loss of her daughter into words, Lila in fact resorts to the fantastic mode to articulate a dimension of reality that resonates with her inner emotional turmoil. In the absence of authoritative authorship, Lila projects her muted suffering onto the rich canvas of Naples, a chimeric space that under Lila's oblique gaze assumes a "luccichio segreto", a "rilevanza fantastica" (sbp 423-24; slc 488-89) in every detail of the urban landscape.[xxxvii] In a further move that underscores the seamless integration of the fantastic and the real dimension, Lila records not only the mythical undercurrent but also the Parthenopean city's long history of patriarchal violence which is intrinsically bound up with the quotidian abuse experienced by the two friends (sbp 425; slc 489). Akin to Sebold's medium Ruth, Lila documents the individual, silenced destinies of murdered women in graphic detail (snc 343: snn 343), authoring a "testo fantasma" (sbp 431)[xxxviii] that we can only glimpse through Elena's words (snc 343; snn 343).

Ferrante's narration oscillates between Elena's attempts at imparting order and the extreme emotion captured in Lila's episodes of *smarginatura* as a reaction to the violent upheavals that trigger them: fireworks, gendered violence, and earthquakes, just to name a few (sbp 162; slc 184; see also sfr 113; tls 128-129). On the one hand, Lila's "potenza emotiva" (snc 288)[xxxix] allows her to intensify reality, exploding conventional modes of representation to recreate the real as "an immediate, felt reality" (Arva 60). On the other, the centrifugal force of her inner self drives her to destroy everything (sbp 164; slc 187) – including herself (sfr 315; tls 345-346) – in a perpetual cycle of creation and destruction that ruptures yet also informs and sustains Elena's writing: "devo sempre fare, rifare, coprire, scoprire, rinforzare, e poi all'improvviso disfare, spaccare" (sbp 163)[xl]. In an intricate

interplay that propels the narrative forward, Lila's diabolic voice continues to 'prod' the text like a Goethean Mephistopheles (sfr 91; tls 105).[xli]

As she "adapts the word used by Lila and accentuates its metaphoric value" (Ferrante, 'The Elena Ferrante Interview'), Elena is well aware that without Lila she would not have been able to portray an oblique reality ("la banalità scoordinata, antiestetica, illogica, sformata, delle cose"; sbp 292)[xlii] that escapes conventional modes of representation. The magical realist dimension in the quartet provides a literary code that gives expression to an excess of emotion that cannot be contained in the conventional realist frame, just as the latter cannot represent the unrepresentable reality of the traumatized subject ("la potenza sotteranea del vero"; de Rogatis). It is Lila's story that emerges most vividly in the episodes of *smarginatura* that undermine and shatter the linearity of the text to expose the atavistic surge of emotion and the silenced spaces of the traumatized subject that emerge in its creaks (*spiragli*; see Carvalho 94). As Di Iorio Sandín argues, the magical realist code becomes especially productive for "the imaginaries of the formerly enslaved […] the colonized, and anyone who has experienced psychic trauma" (25). In what bears strong resonance with Morante's counter-hegemonic novelistic project, Lila/Elena's polyphonic act of testimony similarly resists the dominant master narrative to give expression to the subaltern voices which have all too long been silenced by patriarchal violence.

CONCLUSION

Traumatic experience escapes understanding and resists representation as it remains disconnected from the domains of conventional language and memory. Silenced terror induced by sexual violence against women is one of the phenomena that lie beyond narrativization in realist and factual accounts of the female subject. Sebold's textualization of

sexual violence conceals a powerful attempt to disown the rapist whilst bearing testimony to the muted horror experienced by women who were unable to tell. In a hybrid genre that allows for fertile cross-contamination between reality, fiction and fantasy (in *The Lovely Bones*), aesthetic expression assumes a maieutic function as it not only articulates but engenders an unclaimed and unprocessed truth. Ferrante's narratives of abuse are similarly intent on expressing the silenced tale of patriarchal violence. Whilst they remain deeply anchored in a realist narrative framework, they are persistently punctured by an uncontainable undercurrent of emotion and a silenced terror that is commonly excluded from our cultural imaginaries.

By conferring a new centrality on these unacknowledged stories, Sebold and Ferrante's texts reveal the potential of trauma narratives to not only resist appropriation, but also to perform a critical function in revealing the hegemonic norms that underlie conceptualizations of the female self. Challenging the boundaries imposed on fact-based accounts of traumatic experience to delve into the lapses, gaps and absences of the traumatized imagination, the two authors' aesthetic projects give new shape to a formerly unimagined and unwritten but real experience.

Notes

[i] For a comprehensive overview of feminist movements against gendered violence (mainly in the Italian context), see e.g. Bettaglio, pp.13-79.

[ii] Since at least the 1990s, trauma has increasingly come to be considered an "all-inclusive" paradigm of our age precisely because the "radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience" highlight the limits of our understanding in a wide range of disciplines (Luckhurst 14; Caruth 4).

[iii] Of course, gendered violence can also be directed against men. However, women remain disproportionately affected by violent crime: https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/domestic-abuse-is-a-gendered-crime/ (accessed 4 June 2020).

[iv] Herman cites Sebold's *New York Times* article as an example of PTSD in turn (51).

[v] Only around 15% of those who have experienced sexual abuse report the crime, of which only 5.7% result in a conviction: https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-informed/about-sexual-violence/statistics-sexual-violence/ Accessed 30 April 2020

[vi] See also Di Tella, who suggests some parallels between the tunnel trope in Sebold and Ferrante.

[vii] tl 118: "I remember everything or almost everything. Only the words are missing"

[viii] tl 130: "I was pretending not to be me. I didn't want to be 'I', unless it was the I of Amalia".

[ix] "I did what I imagined Amalia did in secret […] I was I and I was her. I-her met each other with Caserta" (tl 130-31).

[x] "Was it possible that I, passing through there, carried her in my aging, unsuitably dressed body?"; tl 108-09.

[xi] "[…] so that the sounds and images […] coalesce again among the rocks and shadows" (tl 109).

[xii] "as soon as she tried to speak"; tl, 93.

[xiii] "Lila let out a shout and laughed at the violent explosion of sound. Immediately I shouted and laughed in turn." (bf 75)

[xiv] De Rogatis has rightly observed that it is Elena who experiences the first episode of *smarginatura* (*Key Words* 88). I am focusing on Lila to highlight the psychosomatic effects of trauma.

[xv] "From the muck of the neighborhood" (snn 41)

[xvi] "soundless terror" (snn 42).

[xvii] "Lila was absent" (snn 42).

[xviii] "she would be plunged into a sticky, jumbled reality and would never again be able to give sensations clear outlines." (slc 185)

[xix] "A tactile emotion would melt into a visual one, a visual one would melt into an olfactory one […] the waters would break through, a flood would rise, carrying everything off in clots of menstrual blood, in cancerous polyps, in bits of yellowish fiber" (slc 185). See Ferrara on Ferrante's posthuman worldview and the close interaction of her characters with organic and inorganic materiality.

[xx] Emanuela Caffè's reading of the quartet in this volume also focuses on Lila's state of PTSD and its relations to social class.

[xxi] In this context, see also Caffè and de Rogatis 89.

[xxii] "Tina had come out of her belly again" (slc 405).

[xxiii] See also Caffè on the de-pathologization of trauma.

[xxiv] Freud identifies the psychological determinants of hysteria as "a psychic trauma, a conflict of affects, and […] a disturbance in the sphere of sexuality" (Freud 24). Dora also suffered from aphonia.

[xxv] "there is no better medicine for a woman" (tls 194).

[xxvi] For more on the relationship between reality and fiction, see also Santovetti's essay in this volume.

[xxvii] Given the rarity of the name "Lila" in a Southern Italian context and considering Sebold and Ferrante's reciprocal public endorsements (Wehling-Giorgi, "Rethinking" 67), the character from *Lucky* might well have inspired Ferrante's Lila.

[xxviii] On the transmissibility of trauma in Ferrante's *The Lost Daughter*, see Haaland.

[xxix] See Di Iori Sandín and Arva.

[xxx] "shattered into a thousand incoherent images" (tl 129).

[xxxi] "a lie of memory" (tl 130).

[xxxii] "to speak is to link together lost times and spaces" (tl 133).

[xxxiii] Amalia is still wearing her engagement and wedding rings, and a pair of earrings given to her by her husband (am 11; tl 14).

[xxxiv] "she had reduced the uneasiness of bodies to paper and fabric […]. [she] had completely invented her story, playing on her own with empty fabrics" (tl 103).

[xxxv] ag 27; bf 31; See also de Rogatis, *Key Words* 144-45; Milkova, "Minotauro" 85; "Mirrors and Labyrinths".

[xxxvi] "the voice set in the writing" (bf 227)

[xxxvii] On the tensions emerging between reality and a liminal fantastic realm in the context of a female Mediterranean South, see Todesco.

[xxxviii] "phantom text" (slc 497)

[xxxix] "emotional power" (SNN 289)

[xl] "I always have to do, redo, cover, uncover, reinforce, and then suddenly undo, break." (SLC 186).

[xli] The epigraph includes the same lexical reference to "pungolo", further reinforcing Lila's "diabolic" role in disrupting and propelling the text forward: "[…] un compagno che lo pungoli e che sia tenuto a fare la parte del diavolo" (AG).

[xlii] "the disjointed, unaesthetic, illogical, shapeless banality of things" (SLC 336).

Works Cited

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, U of Minnesota P, 2010.

Arva, Eugene L. "Writing the Vanishing Real: Hyperreality and Magical Realism." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2008, pp. 60–85.

Bayles Kortsch, Christine. *Dress Culture in Late Victorian Women's Fiction. Literacy, Textiles and Activism*. Ashgate Publishing, 2009.

Bettaglio, Marina, et al. "Introduzione." *Rappresentare la violenza di genere: Sguardi femministi tra critica, attivismo e scrittura*. Milan, Mimesis, 2018, pp. 13–79.

Bliss, Ann V. '"Share Moments, Share Life": The Domestic Photograph as a Symbol of Disruption and Trauma in *The Lovely Bones*'. *Women's Studies* 37 (7), 2008, pp. 861–84.

Caffè, Emanuela. "Global Feminism and Trauma in Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend*". Forthcoming in *MLN* vol. 136, no. 1 (2021).

Caruth, C. *Trauma: Explorations in memory*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.

— *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2007.

Carvalho, Richard. "Smarginatura and Spiragli: Uses of Infinity in Ferrante's Neapolitan Quartet." *Allegoria* 77, 94-111.

De Rogatis, Tiziana. *Elena Ferrante. Parole chiave.* Rome, Edizioni e/o, 2018. *Elena Ferrante's Key Words*. Translated by Will Schutt. Europa Editions, 2019.

— "Global Perspectives and Trauma: Ferrante's Poetics Between Storytelling and Dissolving Margins." Forthcoming in *MLN* vol. 136, no. 1 (2021).

Di Tella, Mara. "Elena Ferrante e Alice Sebold. Appunti per un confronto". *Diacritica*, 27 June 2019, https://diacritica.it/letture-critiche/elena-ferrante-e-alice-sebold-appunti-per-un-confronto.html. Accessed 4 June 2020.

Ferrante, Elena. Please consult *Elena Ferrante's Works and Abbreviations Used*.

Ferrante, Elena."The Ferrante Interview."Translated by Ann Goldstein,Elle, 29 Aug.2020,www.elle.com/culture/books/a33834141/elena-ferrante-interview-the-lying-life-of-adults/

Ferrara, Enrica. "Posthumanism and Identity in Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels." *Posthumanism in Italian Literature and Film: Boundaries and Identity*, edited by Enrica Maria Ferrara. Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 93-116.

Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real the Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. MIT Press, 2009.

Ganguly, Debjani. *This Thing Called the World: the Contemporary Novel as Global Form*. Duke UP, 2016.

Giorgio, Adalgisa. "Nature vs Culture: Repression, Rebellion and Madness in Elsa Morante's *Aracoeli*." *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 109, no. 1, 1994, pp. 93–116.

Guterres, António. "'The Pandemic Is Exposing and Exploiting Inequalities of All Kinds, Including Gender Inequality.'" *United Nations*, 30 Apr. 2020, www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/pandemic-exposing-and-exploiting-inequalities-all-kinds-including.

Haaland, Torunn. "Between Past and Present, Self and Other. Liminality and the Transmission of Traumatic Memory in Elena Ferrante's *La figlia oscura*". *Transmissions of Memory: Echoes, Traumas, and Nostalgia in Post-World War II Italian Culture*, edited by Patrizia Sambuco. Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2018, pp. 143-160.

Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery*, Basic Books, 1997.

Freud, Sigmund. "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol 7. Trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud. Vintage, 2001, pp. 1-122.

Ford, Liz. "'Calamitous': Domestic Violence Set to Soar by 20% during Global Lockdown." *The Guardian*, 28 Apr. 2020, www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/apr/28/calamitous-domestic-violence-set-to-soar-by-20-during-global-lockdown-coronavirus.

Hirsch, Marianne, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Harvard UP, 1997.

LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Johns Hopkins UP, 2014.

Long, Angela. "More than the World's Rape Counsellor." *The Irish Times*, 11 June 2003, www.irishtimes.com/culture/more-than-the-world-s-rape-counsellor-1.362150. Accessed 4 June 2020.

Luckhurst, Roger. *The Trauma Question*. Taylor and Francis, 2013.

Mandolini, Nicoletta. "Telling the Abuse: A Feminist- Psychoanalytic Reading of Gender Violence, Repressed Memory, and Female Subjectivity." *The Works of Elena Ferrante Reconfiguring the Margins,* by Grace Russo Bullaro and Stephanie V. Love, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 271–292.

Milkova, Stiliana. "Artistic Tradition and Feminine Legacy in Elena Ferrante's *L'amore molesto*", in *California Italian Studies* 6 (1), 2016.

— "Elena Ferrante's Visual Poetics: Ekphrasis in *Troubling Love, My Brilliant Friend,* and *The Story of the New Name*." *The Works of Elena Ferrante. Reconfiguring the Margins,* edited by Grace Russo Bullaro and Stephanie Love. Palgrave-Macmillan, 2016, pp. 147-70.

— "Il Minotauro e la doppia Arianna: spazio liminale, labirinto urbano e città femminile ne *L'Amica geniale* di Elena Ferrante". *Contemporanea* 15, 2017, pp. 77-88.

— "Mirrors and Labyrinths in Elena Ferrante's Works". Forthcoming in *MLN* vol. 136, no. 1, 2021.

Morante, Elsa. *La Storia*. Turin, Einaudi, 1995.

— *Aracoeli*. Turin, Einaudi, 1982.

Norman, Brian. "Dead Woman Coming of Age: Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*." *Dead Women Talking: Figures of Injustice in American Literature*, Johns Hopkins UP, 2014, pp. 143–160.

Parisi, Luciano. "Trauma e riparazione nell'*Amore molesto* di Elena Ferrante". *Studi Novecenteschi*, vol. XLIV, 93, 2017, pp. 167-188.

Sandín Lyn Di Iorio, and Richard Perez. *Moments of Magical Realism in U.S. Ethnic Literatures*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Santovetti, Olivia. Künstlerroman *of 'late modernity': Karl Ove Knausgård's* My Struggle *and Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Quartet.* Forthcoming in *MLN* vol. 136, no. 1, 2021.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain*. Oxford UP, 1988.

Sebold, Alice. "Speaking of the Unspeakable." *The New York Times*, 26 Feb. 1989, www.nytimes.com/1989/02/26/magazine/hers-speaking-of-the-unspeakable.html. Accessed 20 May 2020.

— *Lucky*. Picador, 1999.

— *The Lovely Bones*. Picador, 2002.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. Penguin, 1979.

Stone Watt, Susan. "Seeking Survival, Justice, and Recovery: Citizen Critics' Therapeutic Interpretations of Alice Sebold's Lucky." *Women and Language*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2014, pp. 63–86.

Todesco, Serena. "A Female Mediterranean? Postcoloniality, the *Mezzogiorno* and the Role of Women's Literature." *A Sea of Literatures: Theories, Concepts, and Methods of Mediterranean Literary Studies.* University of Graz, 10-12 October, 2019. Conference Paper.

Van der Kolk, B, and O Van der Hart. "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, by Cathy Caruth, Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.

Wark, Penny. “Don’t Call Me a Survivor: I Am a Victim.” *The Times*, 4 June 2003, www.thetimes.co.uk/article/dont-call-me-a-survivor-i-am-a-victim-0bhr0rdk38h. Accessed 1 June 2020.

Wehling-Giorgi, Katrin. “Rethinking Constructs of Maternity in the Novels of Elena Ferrante and Alice Sebold.” *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2019, pp. 66–83.

— “‘Ero Separata Da Me’: Memory, Selfhood and Mother-Tongue in Goliarda Sapienza and Elena Ferrante'.” *Goliarda Sapienza in Context: Intertextual Relationships with Italian and European Culture*, by Alberica Bazzoni et al., Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2016, pp. 215–230.

— “'Totetaco': The Mother-Child Dyad and the Pre-Conceptual Self in Elsa Morante's *La Storia* and *Aracoeli*.” *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2013, pp. 192–200.

Zamora, Lois Parkinson, and Wendy B. Faris. “Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s.” *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Duke UP, 2006, pp. 1–11.